

PASTOR'S MEANDERINGS
SEVENTEENTH SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME (A)

25 -26 JULY 2020



SUNDAY REFLECTION

What is it worth to acquire membership of the Kingdom of Heaven? Everything, according to Matthew. What does it cost to acquire membership of the Kingdom of Heaven? Everything. The decision to become a disciple, to accept the person and the teachings of Jesus is presented in the New Testament as a life-or-death decision, 'costing not less than everything'. Many of us know people who have had to make tremendous sacrifices in terms of family and social relationships to embrace a different religion or denomination, and some of us who were born and raised as Christians might wish from time to time that we had had the chance to make this vital decision for ourselves, rather than having been baptized as infants and brought up in our faith as a matter of course. Renewing our baptismal promises at the Easter Vigil is perhaps not quite the same.

However, although the initial decision may be a once-and-for-all event, the consequences of it are ongoing and daily. Solomon asks for the ability to fulfil his life-long task as king, and the Lord gives him 'a heart wise and shrewd': over the past few Sundays we have seen how this theme of wisdom recurs in our scripture readings, and here we reach the culmination of Jesus' teaching about the Kingdom in parables, that when someone realizes what is being offered by Jesus, nothing will stand in that person's way to laying hold of it joyfully. But initial joy and enthusiasm, otherwise known as 'first fervor' will not sustain anyone for long, and so an awareness of the Spirit as the driving force in our lives is essential. Jesus in Himself is the wisdom of God, the chief and clearest way in which God is revealed to human beings, and to be a Christian is to be in a personal relationship with God through Jesus, rather than simply holding a particular set of beliefs: it is from this relationship that our daily lives as Christians derive their meaning.

The idea of 'selling everything', if taken literally, can make this teaching appear as though 'the treasure' or 'the pearl' is something restricted to the priesthood or religious life, neither of which existed (certainly not in any form with which we are familiar) at the time when the gospel was written. It is worth remembering, that when it comes to God, there are no privileged people. There are different functions, gifts, duties and callings within the church, but no one with inside knowledge as regards God. The vocation of every Christian is to be 'a true image of God's Son', as Paul puts it, and this is a daily task, based on the daily decision to continue along the path of the disciple. This may involve difficulties, but if it becomes a burden, then there is something wrong, and we will need wisdom to discern the problem and its solution.

STEWARDSHIP: "The law of Your mouth is to me more precious than thousands of gold and silver pieces," says the psalmist today. Does the amount of my offering suggest that I could honestly say the same?

READINGS FOR THE EIGHTEENTH SUNDAY

2 AUG '20

Is.55:1-3: The prophet assures the exiles in Babylon of the providence and unceasing care of God for His chosen people.

Rom. 8:35, 37-39: Nothing can come between us and the love of God made visible in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Mt. 14:13-31: Jesus instructs the disciples to give the people something to eat.

INTENTION FOR AUGUST

The Maritime World. We pray for all those who work on and derive their living from the sea, among them sailors, fishermen and their families.

AUGUST DEDICATED to the IMMACULATE HEART of MARY

Why?

In the Catholic Church there grew over time specific "devotions" that were assigned to each month of the year. The month of June became associated with the Sacred Heart of Jesus because the feast of the Sacred Heart always falls within that month.

August became known as a month dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. The Immaculate Heart is often venerated together with the Sacred Heart of Jesus (the devotion we celebrate in June), and with good reason. Just as the Sacred Heart represents Christ's love for mankind, the Immaculate Heart represents the desire of the Blessed Virgin to bring all people to her Son.

Currently it is difficult to know why this dedication is the case. There exists no particular feast and the main celebration in August is the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on August 15.

The reason why August became associated with the Immaculate Heart of Mary is because of World War II and the devotion of Pope Pius XII to Our Lady of Fatima.

The world was in turmoil in the 1940s and in 1942, Pope Pius XII responded to the requests of Our Lady of Fatima and consecrated the world to the Immaculate Heart of Mary on October 31, 1942.

When the war continued, Pius XII again turned to the Immaculate Heart.

On May 4, 1944, Pope Pius XII established the feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary on August 22, the octave day of the feast of the Assumption. He did so that by her intercession may be obtained “peace among nations, freedom for the Church, the conversion of sinners, the love of purity and the practice of virtue.”

This remained the day dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary up until after the Second Vatican Council.

After the revision of the General Calendar, Pope Paul VI decided to switch the feasts of the Immaculate Heart and the Queenship of Mary. The feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary was joined to the feast of the Sacred Heart of Jesus (celebrated on the Saturday following the feast of the Sacred Heart, typically in June) and the Queenship of Mary was moved to August 22.

This was in part to recognize the fact that Mary’s queenship is closely connected to that of her Assumption into heaven celebrated on August 15.

Even after the switching of the feasts, many Catholics continued to celebrate August as a month dedicated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, as they felt her message at Fatima needed to be heard in a more extended way.

This designation of August is not an “official” spiritual theme decreed by the Catholic hierarchy, but simply an historical development that grew out of World War II and the message of Our Lady of Fatima.

THE MASS

When we speak of the Mass often the term “liturgy” is used almost interchangeably. Is that accurate?

What does Liturgy Actually Mean?

Liturgy in the Christian church is a rite or system of rituals prescribed for public worship in any Christian denomination or church – a customary repertoire or repetition of ideas, phrases, or observances. Various elements of a Christian liturgy include baptism, communion, kneeling, singing, prayer, repetition of sayings, sermon or homily, the sign of the cross, altar call, and benediction.

A Lay person’s definition of the word *liturgy* is a corporate religious service offered to God by the people, including Sunday worship, baptism, and communion. The liturgy can be understood as a solemn drama involving God and His worshippers, consisting of an exchange of prayers, praise, and graces. It is a sacred time rendered in a sacred space.

The original Greek word *leitourgia* which means “service,” “ministry,” or “work of the people” was used for any public work of the people, not only religious services. In ancient Athens, a liturgy was a public office or duty performed voluntarily by a wealthy citizen.

The Liturgy of the Eucharist (a sacrament commemorating the Last Supper by consecrating bread and wine) is a liturgy in the Catholic and Orthodox Churches. The Liturgy of the Word is the portion of the worship service devoted to lessons from the Scriptures. It precedes the Liturgy of the Eucharist and includes a sermon, or teaching from the Bible.

Liturgical Churches include the Catholic Church, the various branches of Orthodox Christianity (such as Eastern Orthodox, Coptic Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc.), as well as many protestant churches that chose to preserve some of the ancient forms of worship, tradition and ritual after the Reformation. The typical practices of a liturgical church include vested clergy, the incorporation of religious symbols, the recitation of prayers and congregational responses, the use of incense, the observance of a yearly liturgical calendar, and the celebration of sacraments, the number of which may vary.

In the United States, the primary liturgical churches are Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Episcopal, and Lutheran. Non-liturgical churches could be categorized as those which do not follow a script or standard order of events. Apart from worship, offering time, and communion, at most non-liturgical churches, the congregation typically sit, listen, sing and observe. At a liturgical church service, the congregation is relatively active –reciting, responding, sitting, kneeling, standing, etc.

The Liturgical Calendar refers to the cycle of seasons in the Christian church. The liturgical calendar determines when feast days and holy days are observed throughout the year. In the Catholic Church, the liturgical calendar begins with the first Sunday of Advent in November, followed by Christmas, Lent, Triduum, Easter, and Ordinary Time.

The sequence of these seasons is more than just marking time; it is a structure within which the story of Jesus and the Gospel message is recounted throughout the year and people are reminded about the significant aspects of the Christian Faith. While not directly a part of most services of worship beyond Holy Days, the Christian Calendar provides the framework in which all worship is done.

SCRIPTURE REFLECTIONS

WEEK OF 27 JULY - 1 AUG 2020

Monday 27 July

Can You Make a Difference?

“The Kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that a person took and sowed in a field. It is the smallest of all the seeds, yet when full-grown it is the largest of plants. It becomes a large bush, and the birds of the sky come and dwell in its branches.” (Mt. 13:31-32)

Too often we tend to feel as though our lives are not nearly as important as others. We can often look to others who are far more “powerful” and “influential.” We can tend to dream about being like them. What if I had their money? Or if I had their social status? Or if I had their job? Or was as popular as they are? Too often, we fall into the trap of the “what ifs.” This passage above reveals the absolute fact that God wants to use your life for great things! The smallest seed becomes the largest bush. This begs the question, “Do you feel like the smallest seed at times?”

It’s normal to feel insignificant at times and to wish we were “more.” But this is nothing more than a worldly and erroneous daydream. The truth is that each one of us is capable of making a HUGE difference in our world. No, we may not make the nightly news or receive national

awards of greatness, but in God's eyes we have potential beyond what we could ever daydream about.

Put this in perspective. What is greatness? What does it mean to be transformed by God into the "largest of plants" as the mustard seed is? It means we are given the incredible privilege to fulfill the exact, perfect and glorious plan God has for our lives. It is this plan that will produce the best and most abundant eternal fruit. Sure, we may not get the name recognition here on Earth. But so what?! Does that really matter? When you are in Heaven will you be depressed that the world did not recognize you and your role? Most certainly not. In Heaven all that will matter is how holy you became and how completely you fulfilled the divine plan for your life. Saint Mother Teresa often said, "We are called to be faithful, not successful." It is this fidelity to the will of God that matters.

Reflect, today, upon two things. First, reflect upon your "littleness" before the mystery of God. By yourself you are nothing. But in that humility, reflect also upon the fact that when you live in Christ and in His divine will you are great beyond measure. Strive for that greatness and you will be eternally blessed!

Lord, I know that without You I am nothing. Without You my life has no meaning. Help me to embrace Your perfect and glorious plan for my life and, in that plan, to achieve the greatness to which You call me. Jesus, I trust in You.

Tuesday 28 July

Final Victory!

"Just as weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age.

The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his Kingdom all who cause others to sin and all evildoers. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth. Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Whoever has ears ought to hear." (Mt. 13:40-43)

Imagine that day! Imagine if that day were tomorrow. If Jesus were returning tomorrow and executing all justice upon the world, would you worry about any injustice today? Probably not. Instead, there would be an ability to sit back and be at peace knowing that justice was coming.

Well, that day is coming soon. That's what Jesus said. Granted, that was said almost 2,000 years ago, but for Him it is still soon. Time, for God, takes on an eternal perspective. Therefore, the end of the world is as real for God today as it is when it actually happens.

This is a good thing to keep in mind when we see evil thrive and injustice grow. It's so very easy to get angry and upset about the daily victories of the evil one. But fear not and worry not. God truly is in control. He knows what He is doing and He will have the final glorious victory over all things.

So think about that. When Jesus does return in all His glory and sets all things right, will the evil we now endure even matter? In fact, from the eternal perspective, the evil we endure should only serve to give us holy endurance. It has all potential to be used by God to manifest His grace and strength in our lives.

Reflect, today, upon the eternal perspective. If you persevere through all things now, and you strive to do so with patience and grace, you can be certain that all the struggle and all you have to endure will be worth it in the end. In the new glorious Kingdom of God you will be at peace,

and joy will fill your life forever. Every wrong will be made right and God will be victorious. Make sure you have “ears to hear” this truth and hold on to it through all things. *Lord, help me to keep my eyes on You and Your final victory. Help me to patiently await Your final victory and to endure the evil of this world with the grace and strength You give me. May I never forget the final promise that You have spoken to me. Jesus, I trust in You.*

Wednesday 29 July

The Pearl of Great Price

“Again, the Kingdom of heaven is like a merchant searching for fine pearls. When he finds a pearl of great price, he goes and sells all that he has and buys it.” (Mt. 13:45-46)

There are many beautiful insights we can take from this passage. Certainly we can see the Kingdom of Heaven as analogous to that “Pearl of Great Price!” But the passage actually states that the Kingdom of Heaven is analogous to the “merchant searching for fine pearls.” This is a revealing fact.

One insight this offers us is that the Kingdom of Heaven is found in our diligent search. We search the mystery of Heaven and it is this search that, in and of itself, presents to us God’s Kingdom.

Speaking of the “search for God” is another way of saying that God is a profound Mystery of Faith, a *Mysterium Fidei* as we say in Mass. As a divine “Mystery” it’s important to understand that we can never fully “find” God. We certainly can find Him, understand Him, come to know Him and give our lives to Him. But we can never do so fully. The truth is that the more we come to know God, the more we seek Him and the more we seek Him the more we realize we do not fully know Him. But this revelation draws us ever more deeply into the life of God and the acquisition of the Kingdom of Heaven.

The discovery of the beauty, value, mystery, power, and glory of God and His Kingdom is what life must be about. We must spend this life searching, finding, and searching more. This is what we will do in Heaven. Heaven will be a moment of the full revelation of the Kingdom and the inner life of God, but we will discover in this revelation that we will eternally enter more deeply into God and His glorious presence.

Reflect, today, upon the search that you embark on in your life. Is it a diligent search for God? Or do you grow slack in this endeavor? Recommit yourself to a wholehearted search for God and you will find that this search is actually a discovery of the glories of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Lord, I love You and desire to love You all the more. Please fill me with zeal and hope as I seek You. May my wholehearted search for You reveal to me the mystery of Your glorious inner life. As I discover You, help me to seek You all the more. Jesus, I trust in You.

Thursday 30 July

The Justice of God

“Thus it will be at the end of the age. The angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.” (Mt. 13:49-50)

Not all that inspiring of a statement at first read, is it? But it should be inspiring in the way that it was intended. It was intended to put a certain “holy fear” in us as well as reassure us of God’s justice. This is inspiring, just not in the usual way we think of being inspired.

But sometimes we need a little holy fear of God and His justice in our lives. In our day and age sin is becoming continually more accepted and “normal.” Our worldwide culture seems to be growing steadily more secular. Immoral living of many types appears to be on the rise. As a result, it is easy for us to start seeing sin as normal and even acceptable. In fact, when we name sin as sin, our world often calls us judgmental and hateful.

If you find yourself at times feeling pressured to give in to the immorality all around you and just “accept it,” then perhaps the passage above will inspire you to do just the opposite. The absolute truth is that Jesus has named some things as sin and committing those sins brings grave consequences.

It could be the very subtle cultural practice of turning the Lord’s Day (Sunday) into anything but a day of rest. Or it could be grave violations to the sanctity of married and family life through the redefinition of marriage. Each of us will certainly notice various ways in which we feel our faith is challenged and even attacked. If that’s you, then this Scripture is for you. Jesus is serious about sin and the consequences of sin. That should inspire us to not only live holy lives, but also to do all we can to assist those caught up in the disordered cultural tendencies to change their lives.

Reflect, today, on how strongly you are opposed to sin. Sin is evil and destructive. You must always love the person who commits sin, but you ought never offer support or approval for their actions that are contrary to the law of God. Standing strong in the face of cultural opposition is a great act of love and may free some, one day, from the “wailing and grinding of teeth” of which Jesus spoke.

Lord, where sin abounds grace abounds all the more. Your grace is so needed today in our world and in my life. Help me to stay strong in my opposition to evil and sin so as to be among those who are gathered into Your Kingdom. Give me courage to do all I can to help those on the path of destruction. Jesus, I trust in You.

Friday 31 July

God’s Mightiest Deed

And he did not work many mighty deeds there because of their lack of faith. (Mt. 13:58) What are “mighty deeds?” What was Jesus limited in doing in His home town because of a lack of faith? The first thing that obviously comes to mind are miracles. He most likely did not do many healings, or raise anyone from the dead, or multiply food so as to feed the multitude. But are these the mighty deeds spoken of?

The right answer would be both “Yes” and “No.” Yes, Jesus was limited in doing miracles and it appears He did very few in His hometown. But there were deeds that Jesus regularly did that were far more “mighty” than physical miracles. What are those? They were the deeds of transforming souls.

What does it matter, in the end, if Jesus does many miracles but souls are not converted? What is more “mighty” as far as lasting and meaningful action? Certainly the transformation of souls is of the highest of importance!

But sadly, the mighty deeds of the transformation of souls could not take place either, due to their lack of faith. The people were clearly obstinate and not open to letting the words and presence of Jesus penetrate their minds and hearts. For that reason, Jesus could not do the mightiest of deeds in His home town.

Reflect, today, on whether or not Jesus is doing mighty deeds in your life. Are you letting Him transform you daily into a new creation? Are you letting Him do great things in your life? If you hesitate in answering this question it is a clear sign that God wants to do much more in your life.

Lord, I pray that my soul be fertile ground for Your most magnificent work. I pray that my soul be transformed by You, Your words and Your presence in my life. Come into my heart and transform me into Your masterpiece of grace. Jesus, I trust in You.

Saturday 1 August

The Sad Fruit of Hate

“Give me here on a platter the head of John the Baptist.” (Mt. 14:8)

Ugh, what a bad day to say the least. St. John the Baptist was beheaded at the request of Salome, the daughter of Herodias. John was in prison for speaking the truth to Herod regarding his marriage, and Herodias was filled with hate toward John. So Herodias had her daughter dance in the presence of Herod and his guests. Herod was so impressed, he promised Salome up to half of his kingdom. Instead, her request was for the head of John the Baptist.

Even on the surface this is a bizarre request. Salome is promised up to half of the kingdom and, instead, she asks for the death of a good and holy man. In fact, Jesus said of John that no one born of woman was greater than he was. So why all the hate by Herodias and her daughter? This sad incident illustrates the power of anger in its most extreme form. When anger brews and grows it causes deep passion, so much so that it clouds a person’s thinking and reason. Hate and revenge can consume a person and lead to complete foolishness.

Herod is also a witness of extreme irrationality here. He is pressured to do what he does not want to do because he is afraid of doing the right thing. He is overwhelmed by the hate in the heart of Herodias and, as a result, gives in to the execution of John whom he actually appeared to like and enjoyed listening to.

Normally we seek to be inspired by the good example of others. But, in this case, we find we can be “inspired” in a different way. We should use the witness of John’s execution as an opportunity to look at any struggles we have with anger, resentment and especially hate. Hate is an ugly passion that can sneak in and cause much destruction in our lives and the lives of others. Even the beginnings of this disordered passion should be confessed and overcome. Reflect, today, upon whether you see any hate in your heart. Have you held on to some grudge or bitterness that is not going away? Is that passion growing and causing damage to your life and the lives of others? If so, resolve to let go of it and forgive. It’s the right thing to do.

Lord, give me the grace I need to look into my heart and see any tendencies of anger, resentment and hatred. Please purify me of these and set me free. Jesus, I trust in You.

PRAYERS

The Angelus

The Angelus is a meditation on the Incarnation, and Mary's role in it. Like all prayers to Virgin Mary, we ask her for guidance and prayers. The first three verses are taken from Scripture. The Angelus is traditionally said daily at 12 noon. Many Catholic churches ring their church bells at noon, the Angelus bells, to call the faithful to prayer. This is often said as a group prayer, with the leader speaking the **V** parts and the group responding with the **R** lines. If you're saying it alone, just read both parts together.

V - The Angel of the Lord declared unto Mary.
R - And she conceived by the Holy Spirit

Hail Mary ...

V - Behold the hand maid of the Lord.
R - Be it done unto me according to thy word.

Hail Mary ...

V - And the Word was made Flesh
R - And dwelt among us.

Hail Mary ...

V - Pray for us, O Holy Mother of God.
R - That we may be made worthy of the promises of Christ.
Let Us Pray: Pour forth, we beseech You, O Lord, Your grace into our hearts, that we to whom the incarnation of Christ, Your Son, was made known by the message of an angel, may by His passion and cross be brought to the glory of His resurrection. Through the same Christ our Lord. Amen

The Magnificat (Canticle of Mary)

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord, my spirit finds joy in God my savior; for he has looked upon His servant in her lowliness; all ages to come shall call me blessed. God who is mighty has done great things for me, holy is His name; His mercy is from age to age on those who fear Him. He has shown might with His arm; He has confused the proud in their inmost thoughts. He has deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. The hungry He has given every good thing, while the rich He has sent empty away. He has upheld Israel his servant, ever mindful of His mercy; Even as He promised our fathers, promised Abraham and His descendants forever.
Amen.

Bad times, hard times — this is what people keep saying; but let us live well and times shall be good. We are the times. Such as we are, such are the times.

- Saint Augustine of Hippo -



The Catholic Gentleman

